

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT (SFWMD)

WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION (WRAC) LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING, JUNE 29, 2005

**3301 Gun Club Road, Building B-1 Auditorium
West Palm Beach, Florida 33406**

MEETING REPORT

Introduction/Background:

- The WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee, appointed by WRAC Chair Michael Collins and approved by the SFWMD Governing Board in June 2005, is initially charged to make recommendations to improve and speed up Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan projects. It is also to review lake water management system operations and regulation schedules to recommend appropriate improvements.
- Future tasks for the committee include the review of proposals for additional water storage within lake tributary drainage basins, and the review of proposals for additional or innovative phosphorous reduction methods.
- The committee tasks are consistent with the SFWMD Strategic Plan and integrated with the WRAC Priority Plan goals and objectives as approved by the SFWMD Governing Board in February 2005.
- The WRAC Priority Plan goals for Lake Okeechobee are to reduce phosphorous through implementation of the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan, and to improve the Lake Okeechobee "WSE" water level regulation schedule.
- The first meeting of the WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee was held at SFWMD headquarters in West Palm Beach. Some 24 committee members or alternates attended. Audience participation was excellent with more than 40 people attending. One new committee member, Mr. Richard Earp, Water Resources Director, Osceola County, was appointed by Chair Michael Collins.

Issues/Discussion by Committee:

- **Committee Purpose and Structure:** the committee purpose and structure were discussed at length. It was generally agreed that because the lake is in serious condition and is not functioning at a sustainable level, all options for lake restoration and management should be reviewed. In addition, it was agreed that a technical fact finding sub-committee would help improve understanding of the lake.

- The committee discussed the need to define success. It was suggested that the committee should review existing goals for lake restoration set forth in State law and other sources, review summaries of the appropriate science, and lessons learned from the past, and then create a vision statement for successful and sustainable lake restoration.
- **Past Management practices; SFWMD stormwater rules:** The committee discussed ideas raised by some members that the past management of the lake has failed and the committee should begin with a consensus statement to that effect. In addition, it was suggested that the volume of runoff has increased because SFWMD Management and Storage of Surface Water rules have allowed an annual increase in peak volume of flows to the lake so that significantly more water is being routed to the lake.
- The Technical Fact Finding sub-committee should review information regarding hydrology of the lake, including historic and current flows from the tributary drainage basins. In addition, a WRAC issues workshop has been created to review this issue and make recommendations about solutions, if warranted. Chair Collins indicated he would seek approval of a technical sub-committee at the July meeting of the SFWMD Governing Board.
- **Lake Operations and Regulation Schedule:** Discussion focused on the need perceived by several committee members to reevaluate the Lake Okeechobee "WSE" water level regulation schedule. It was agreed that the schedule would be reviewed. Chair Collins suggested this would be most appropriate once CERP/Acceler8 reservoir projects are built.
- **Phosphorous Reduction:** Following a presentation by Susan Gray, Ph.D., SFWMD staff, the committee discussed phosphorous loads, reduction methods/projects, and ideas for improvement in reduction methods. Many suggestions for future agenda items were made.
- **Exotic plant species control:** Committee members commented on current aquatic and exotic pest plant control methods. Important native species such as bull rush are being sprayed by contractors. Snail kite nests have also been sprayed. These issues will be discussed at future meetings.
- **Flood control and water supply:** Following a presentation by Bob Howard, SFWMD Department Director, Operations Control and Vegetation Management, the committee discussed lake system operations, water levels, flood control and water supply needs of the region. Many questions were asked and suggestions made for future agenda items.

- **Future Agenda Items:** The future agenda items discussed by the committee included:
 - **Statutory provisions regarding lake restoration and phosphorous reduction**
 - **Review of SFWMD rules regarding Management and Storage of Surface Water**
 - **Summary of Lessons Learned from Lake restoration and management activities**
 - **Breakdown of land values north of the lake**
 - **Tributary drainage basin rainfall, runoff and basin storage and analysis of lake hydrology: inflows/outflows, peak flows, sources, evapotranspiration, etc.**
 - **Presentation by IFAS on Best Management Practices for phosphate control; soil and plant needs for phosphorous**
 - **Analysis of the forms of phosphorous moving into the lake**
 - **Amount of phosphorous in discharges under Zone C regulation schedule releases**
 - **Information on phosphorous loading from the Lake Istokpoga and Indian Prairie basins**
 - **Same for Lower Kissimmee and Fisheating Creek basins**
 - **Presentations on Aquatic Plant control**
 - **Information about canal discharge capacities under certain release and/or back pumping scenarios.**
- **Next Meeting:** date changed from July 27 to **July 28**, [SFWMD Okeechobee Field Station](#), 1000 NE 40th Avenue, Okeechobee, FL 34972. Committee meetings will start at 9:00 a.m.
- The July agenda will include presentations on the Florida Sunshine Law, Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) Lake Okeechobee Watershed projects, and “Fast Track” restoration projects.